
History

California's Stem Cell Agency was created in 2004 when 59% of California voters approved Proposition 71: the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative. That initiative created the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) to fund stem cell research in the state. In addition to creating the agency, Prop 71 created a 29-member governing Board composed of researchers, business leaders and patient advocates.

CIRM held its first meeting in December, 2004 to begin hiring a president, finding a headquarters and establishing the three working groups to advise the board. The agency moved into headquarters in San Francisco in 2005 and issued the first round of funding in 2006.

In 2006, when CIRM first began funding awards, scientists knew very little about the best ways of working with stem cells or of converting them into mature cell types that would be useful as therapies. What's more, funding restrictions from the federal government and legal concerns prevented many scientists from dedicating their labs to regenerative medicine. As a result, few graduate and undergraduate students were learning how to work with the cells. This created a severe shortage in the future stem cell lab workforce.

CIRM realized that if the goal was to generate new therapies, the first steps would need to be getting scientists into stem cell research, giving them space to work and ensuring that young people were entering the field. That's why the first awards were dedicated to training young scientists, building new facilities and pulling California researchers into stem cell science. The agency has also funded research and new facilities and has trained high school, undergraduate and graduate students for careers in stem cell science.

In 2008, the agency awarded a small amount of money to encourage scientists to form teams and think about ways of turning their research into therapies, and in 2009 CIRM began investing in possible future therapies that came out of those early awards. As CIRM's early investments mature, the agency funds increasing numbers of awards with a therapeutic end goal.

In 2015, under the leadership of then President and CEO C. Randal Mills, the Agency launched CIRM 2.0—a radical overhaul of the way the Agency operates. Specifically, CIRM 2.0 introduces faster, more efficient systems and programs that place added emphasis on speed, partnerships and patients.

Some therapies that may come out of CIRM-funded research projects involve transplanting the cells themselves. Others will be drugs that were discovered through modeling diseases in a petri dish. Still others will be diagnostics that allow doctors to diagnose and treat diseases more effectively—or through technologies that open up whole new fields of research. *CIRM funding promotes all areas of stem cell research that show promise to accelerating treatments to patients in need.*

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